



# KEEPING THE PROMISE

## Benefits and Services for Former Prisoners of War

Department of  
Veterans Affairs  
1-800-827-1000  
[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**Keeping the Promise  
Benefits and Services for  
Former Prisoners of War  
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Veterans Benefits Administration  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Washington, DC

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## DEFINITION OF A FORMER PRISONER OF WAR (POW)

**Period of War** – a Former POW is a veteran who, while on active duty in the military, air, or naval service, was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by an enemy government or its agents or a hostile force during a period of war.

Periods of war include: World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, the Vietnam War, and the Gulf War.

**Peacetime-Comparable to Wartime**  
a Former POW also includes a veteran who, while on active duty during peacetime, was forcibly detained or interned by a foreign government or its agents or a hostile force, if the circumstances of the internment were comparable to wartime internment (for example: Somalia or Kosovo).

## HEALTH CARE

Former POWs receive priority treatment for VA health care.

If you have a service-connected disability and are a Former POW, you're eligible for VA health care. This includes hospital, nursing home, and outpatient treatment.

If you don't have a service-connected disability and are a Former POW, you're eligible for VA hospital and nursing home care – without regard to your ability to pay. You are also eligible for outpatient care on a priority basis – second only to veterans with service-connected disabilities.

While you are receiving treatment in an approved outpatient treatment program, you are eligible for needed medicines, glasses, hearing aids, or prostheses.

If your POW internment lasted 90 days or more, you are eligible for all needed dental care. Veterans who were POWs for less than 90 days should check with their nearest VA medical facility to determine if other criteria would apply to establish eligibility for dental care.



## DISABILITY COMPENSATION

Former POWs are eligible for VA service-connected disability compensation to the same extent as other veterans.

If you were a POW for at least 30 days and are diagnosed with any of the conditions below, the condition is presumed to be related to service. Presumptive disabilities are based on studies of the long-term effects of captivity, deprivation, trauma, and cold injury on former POWs. For first-time claimants, there must be a special POW Protocol Examination conducted at a VA medical facility to help determine if you have any of these disabilities.

**POW presumptive disabilities** fall into the following categories:

**Nutritional.** These disabilities result from the long-term effects of the malnutrition suffered as a POW. While you may not be

suffering from malnutrition now, it is possible to have residual disabilities from malnutrition during captivity. These include:

- Avitaminosis – a disease resulting from lack of vitamins.
- Beriberi – a disease marked by inflammatory or degenerative changes of the nerves, digestive system, and heart caused by a lack of thiamin.
- Malnutrition (including atrophy associated with malnutrition).
- Pellagra – a disease marked by dermatitis, stomach disorders, intestinal disorders, and nerve symptoms associated with a lack of niacin.
- Any other nutritional deficiency.

**Helminthiasis.** Infectious residuals from any type of parasitic worm.

**Neuro-Psychiatric.** Disabilities in this category are normal consequences of POW captivity. Some of these disabilities can show up many years following captivity and can produce mild to severe symptoms. Irritability, anxiety, restlessness, sleep disorders, and unsociability are only a few of the symptoms. These disabilities include:

- Psychosis
- Dysthymic Disorder (Depressive Neurosis)
- Any of the Anxiety States (e.g., PTSD)

**Gastrointestinal Disabilities.** Including:

- Peptic Ulcer Disease—ulcerations of the digestive tract

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome – symptoms can include pain and constipation, chronic diarrhea, or both.
- Chronic Dysentery – frequent, watery stools with rectal/abdominal pain, fever and dehydration.

**Cold Injury.** The freezing of tissue. The extremities farthest from the heart are usually affected, primarily the nose, ears, hands and feet. This usually produces long-term side effects such as numbness, discoloration, excessive swelling, pain, and possibly arthritis in the affected areas.

**Traumatic Arthritis.** This disability looks and is treated like degenerative arthritis (arthritis associated with age) except it is caused by severe trauma to specific joints.

**Peripheral Neuropathy.** A neurological disorder characterized by numbness and tingling of the extremities. It can be caused by nutritional deficiency and will be evaluated by VA as a separate disability for each extremity affected.

**Ischemic Heart Disease.** A heart disability which may be related to service. Also called coronary artery disease, this disability is characterized by the narrowing of arteries which supply vital oxygen to the heart. Often treated by angioplasty or coronary artery bypass surgery, this is a disability which is commonly found in the aging population; however, this disability can be presumed to be related to service if a diagnosis of this type of heart disease is made and the veteran indicates swelling of the legs (edema) during captivity on his/her POW Protocol Examination.



## DISABILITY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC)

DIC is payable to survivors (spouse, parent or children) of:

- service members who died on active duty
- veterans who died from service-related disabilities
- certain veterans who were being paid 100% VA disability compensation at time of death

Surviving spouses of former POWs qualify if the veteran:

- died after September 30, 1999, *and*
- was continuously rated totally disabled for a service-connected condition for at least 1 year immediately preceding death.

DIC ends if the surviving spouse remarries. But if *that* marriage ends by death or divorce, DIC benefits may start again.

## OTHER BENEFITS

Eligible Former POWs and their surviving spouses may be entitled to other benefits available through VA such as disability pension, death pension, loan guaranty, insurance, burial benefits, etc. To obtain information about these benefits see section below.



## WHERE TO GO FOR ASSISTANCE

A Former POW Coordinator has been designated at each VA regional office who can provide you information about and assistance in applying for the benefits and services available to you.

**Call toll-free**

**1-800-827-1000**

**TDD 1-800-829-4833**

**OR**

**Visit the VA Web Site**

**WWW.VA.GOV**

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*"To care for him who shall have borne  
the battle, and for his widow and his  
orphan"*